

# Cultural Collision: The Interference of First Language Cultural Identity on Pragmatic Competence of the Target Language<sup>1</sup>

Coalición Cultural: La Interferencia de la Identidad Cultural Lingüística de la Lengua Materna en la Competencia Pragmática en la Lengua Meta

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## Abstract

This reflective study explores a different perspective of intercultural communicative competency (ICC) by focusing on the speech acts that non-native speakers of Spanish from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds find difficult to perform competently in various contexts in Colombia. This article covers a qualitative case study using interpretative phenomenological analysis to describe these foreign learners' experiences. It aims to understand the role of their first language, culture, and identity in their use of Spanish and intercultural communication. The data was collected through interviews and reflection notes. The findings demonstrate the interaction and negotiation between the pragmatic knowledge embedded in participants' mother tongue and the target language as they encountered contradictions of their native cultural identity and that of the target culture.

*Keywords:* language, culture, cultural identity, pragmatic competence, intercultural communication.

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## Resumen

Este artículo de tipo reflexivo explora una perspectiva diferente de la competencia comunicativa intercultural (CCI) al enfocarse en cómo algunos actos del habla del español hablado en Colombia se les dificulta a hablantes no nativos provenientes de diversas procedencias lingüísticas y culturales en varios contextos en Colombia. Este artículo describe un estudio de caso cualitativo el cual utiliza el análisis fenomenológico interpretativo para describir las experiencias de estos aprendices extranjeros. Además, tiene como propósito entender el rol de su lengua nativa, cultural e identidad al utilizar el español y la comunicación intercultural. Los datos fueron recolectados a través de entrevistas y notas de reflexión. Los resultados demuestran que la interacción y negociación entre el conocimiento pragmático innato a la lengua nativa de los participantes y la del español son contradictorias de su propia identidad cultural y la del uso de la cultura objetivo.

*Palabras clave:* Lengua y cultura, la identidad cultural, competencia pragmática, comunicación intercultural

## Resumo

Este artigo de tipo reflexivo explora uma perspectiva diferente da competência comunicativa intercultural (CCI) ao enfocar-se em como alguns atos da fala do espanhol falado na Colômbia se causa dificuldade aos falantes não nativos provenientes de diversas procedências linguísticas e culturais em vários contextos na Colômbia. Este artigo descreve um estudo de caso qualitativo, o qual utiliza a análise fenomenológica interpretativa para descrever as experiências destes aprendizes estrangeiros. Além do mais, tem como propósito entender o papel da sua língua nativa, cultural e identidade ao utilizar o espanhol e a comunicação intercultural. Os dados foram coletados através de entrevistas e notas de reflexão. Os resultados demonstram que a interação e negociação entre o conhecimento pragmático inato à língua nativa dos participantes e a do espanhol são contraditórias da sua própria identidade cultural e a do uso da cultura objetivo.

*Palavras chave:* Língua e cultura, a identidade cultural, competência pragmática, comunicação intercultural

## Introduction

Colombia is developing rapidly and is on the path to globalization and cosmopolitanism. The increasing economic and commercial demands as well as political ties with other nations have created new communicative opportunities. As a result, more foreigners are living and working in Colombia and more Colombians than ever before have direct or indirect contact with people from diverse language and cultural backgrounds in and outside of the country. This phenomenon has produced new challenges for language educators in Colombia to optimize the development of intercultural competence and foster linguistically and culturally double-directional learners, who have a sound understanding of both their native and the target cultures and are able to communicate across language-culture differences. The study was conducted in Colombia with three non-native Spanish speakers (NNSS) from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What speech acts in Spanish do the participants find difficult to use competently in their daily intercultural interaction in Colombia?
2. How does the home culture identity of these NNSS participants influence their pragmatic competence development in the use of Spanish in Colombia?

## Literature Review

The reviewed literature for this study focuses on the awareness of cultural differences to explore how first language culture identity interacts with the pragmatic development of the target language, and aspects of pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication.

## Fundamental Relationship between Native and Target Language Cultures

Language and culture are two sides of the same coin which allow us to gain membership in a particular society or community. However, we rarely contemplate the function of our native language system, or the role and impact of the phrases and expressions that we use on a daily basis until we encounter and communicate with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds that have different belief systems and social norms. These shared interactions are what make cultures dynamic and never permanently fixed as they are created, recreated and interconnected (Gudykunst, 1983). Culture is defined as the non-

biological part of life; it may be fundamental but not innate because culture is a socially constructed human creation (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Freire, 1970; Jandt, 2001). Hence, cultures have their own internal coherence, logic and validity within a social system (Paige, 1993). Agar (1994) proposes the theory that learning a target language culture is driven by rich point. This occurs when we realize that a culture is different from ours, and we are faced with certain behaviors which we do not understand. The largest rich point is total incomprehension due to huge differences between the source language culture and the target language-culture; it is also the point in which culture shock occurs. Differing societal aspects such as values, behavior, and attitudes are embedded in languages; therefore, one's mother tongue influences the speaker's worldview and is an important source in understanding thoughts, behavioral, and cognitive learning processes (House, 2007).

### **The Role of First Language Culture Identity in L2 Pragmatic Development**

Norton (2013) suggests that language learning is an investment in a learner's own identity. In the process of acquiring an additional language, learners' past and current sense of self encounter and transform each other (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1996; Papastergiadis, 2000). Block (2007) explains further the link between SLA and one's sense of identity "when individuals immerse themselves in new sociocultural environments, they find that their sense of identity is destabilized and that they enter a period of struggle to reach a balance" (p. 864). Since identity is constituted by the social environment, it is constantly changing across time and space. Hence, individuals have the possibility of taking up a range of social identities available to them in the 'cultural supermarket' (Mathews, 2000).

In order to establish the link between L1 and the target language culture, one needs to put their own native culture in relation to the foreign language culture (Kramsch, 1993). Schumann (1978) points out that social distance can either promote or hinder second language acquisition depending on the degree of proximity between the L2 learners and the TL communities. His view is further supported by Fantini's (2009) statement that one's native tongue facilitates thoughts and communication within one's native culture. On the other hand, it can also become the biggest hindrance in understanding another global perspective because it prevents one from, "grasping possibilities inherent and encoded in other systems" (p. 265). Hence, the greater the linguistic, social and cultural distance between learners' L1 and the

target language, the more difficult it may be for learners to overcome the contradictory nature to bridge the cultural disparities. Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) states “all new learning involves transfer based on previous learning.” (p. 53). This could also explain why the initial learning of L1 will impact the learning of L2. Previous cross-cultural pragmatic research also mentioned that L2 or L3 learners tend to transfer their native pragmatic knowledge when they use the target language. When learners apply their knowledge of one language to another language, the L1 interference can result in a positive or negative transfer. When the relevant unit or structure of both languages are the same, linguistic interference can result in correct language production. On the contrary, when the linguistic and cultural distance between the home and the target language is large, the interference is often a negative one. Chiswick & Miller (2005) developed a quantitative measure of the distance between English and other languages based on the difficulty Americans have learning other languages. The lower the scores on a standardized proficiency test, the greater the distance is between these languages and English. The score for Mandarin is 1.5, which is lower than that of Spanish at 2.25. The results demonstrate that when other determinants of language proficiency are the same, the greater the measure of linguistic distance, the poorer is the respondent’s language proficiency. Apparently, Mandarin is more difficult to learn than Spanish for English speakers due to the greater linguistic distance. Hence, Spanish would be more difficult to learn for Mandarin speakers than English speakers.

### **Pragmatic Failure in Cross-Cultural Communication**

Schumann (1987) discusses in his SLA acculturation model that the degree of which learners orient themselves to the target language culture would determine the extent to which learners acquire the second language. A speaker’s linguistic competence is composed of grammatical competence and pragmatic competence. Thomas (1983) terms pragmatic failure as an area of ‘cross-cultural communication breakdown.’ She further states that pragmatic failure results from the hearer’s inability to infer the force of the speaker’s utterance due to the fact that the speaker and the listener do not share the same values, behavior norms, or world views. As a result, the hearer might perceive the force of the speaker’s utterances to be stronger or weaker than the speaker intended. A message may be interpreted to carry a different meaning than was intended when it is encoded by a person in one culture and decoded by a person from another cultural background (Samovar & Porter, cited in Jandt, 2001)

In addition, Fantini (2009) pointed out learners were most surprised and disappointed when they found out that there is no equivalence in the target language for some frequently used phrases in their L1. He argues that speech acts consist of language, behaviors, and interactional strategies, three essential components for intercultural communication. Therefore, inappropriate transference of speech act strategies from L1 to L2 can cause pragma-linguistic failure. Moreover, when the target language has a wider range of connotations of certain speech acts than the mother language, pragmatic overgeneralization is likely to occur. After all, various elements that are taken for granted in a certain culture do not match the elements of another culture. Being an intercultural speaker is not just merely a code-switching task; it involves learning new ways of thinking, new behaviors and interactional styles, as well as integration of one's home cultural identity and the target language identity.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study used a qualitative phenomenology research model as the most appropriate methodology to investigate the phenomena experienced by the participants. According to Welman and Kruger (1999), phenomenology provides a deep understanding of “social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved” (p.189). The following illustration demonstrates the phenomenology research procedures described by Moustakas (1994).



*Figure 1. Procedures for conducting phenomenological research*

## Participants

Prior to the commencement of the study, the participant information statement and participant consent forms were distributed to a university language centre, where there were seven foreign language teachers and assistants. This study was then conducted among those three non-native Spanish speakers who expressed interest and signed the consent forms, which indicated their clear understanding of the study. As this study required participants to describe their personal experiences and perceptions, participants were assured that any identifiable personal details would be kept in the strictest confidence. They were identified by pseudonyms, **Caroline, Lilian and Zi-ge**:

**Caroline** is a 23-year-old female from America. She studied Spanish as a subject for two years at university where she majored in Journalism. At the time of the interview, she was working as an English language assistant at a private University in Bogotá. During her one-year stay in Colombia, she took Spanish classes with a language exchange partner, who was studying to teach Spanish as a foreign language. Her Spanish proficiency level was about B1 at the time of the interview.

**Lilian** is a 25-year-old female from the UK. She started learning Spanish at university, where she majored in French & Spanish. Prior to coming to Colombia, she worked as a language assistant in Guadalajara, Mexico for two years. At the time of interview, she just finished her one-year contract as an English language assistant at a private university in Bogotá. Her Spanish proficiency level was about C1 at the time of the interview.

**Zi-ge** is a 38-year-old female from China. She is married to a Colombian man and is in an intercultural marriage. She works as a Chinese teacher in a language centre of a private university. At the time of the interview, she had lived in Colombia for four years and had taken Spanish classes for two semesters in the beginning of her stay in Colombia. Her Spanish proficiency level was about B1 at the time of the interview.

## Data Collection Instruments

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In collecting the data, semi-structured in-depth phenomenological interviews were conducted, and supplemented by reflection notes written by the participants, which aim to gather the complexity by probing, detailing and clarifying issues. Kvale (1996) describes the use of an interview as “a professional conversation which has a structure to gain access to the perception of the interviewee and has a purpose to

interpret the meaning of the described phenomena" (pp. 5-6). One month before the interview, each participant was informed about the purpose of the research to obtain their informed consent. In addition, they were asked to write reflective notes (memos) to help them contemplate the issues and difficulties they encountered in their daily use of Spanish in Colombian context.

The reflection journals of the participants were written in English and Chinese. In their mother tongue, they were able to express their deepest thoughts freely without any restrictions. The interviews were conducted in English with the American and British participants and in Chinese with the Chinese participant.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

The participants' responses to the open-ended interview questions were transcribed, translated (Chinese => English) and analysed. The duration of each interview was about one hour, and contained the participants' extensive responses. Data reduction and transformation were required so that the data could be entered and displayed as a mixture of direct quotes and summary phrases. Thematic analysis (Riessman, 2008) was employed to provide an analysis according to the pre-established research questions to guide the study. Themes emerged through a constant comparative method. The interpretation of the data incorporates both the findings and discussion. The following analysis addresses the first research question: What speech acts in Spanish do the participants find difficult to use competently in their daily intercultural interaction in Colombia?

*Table 1. Speech acts NNSS have difficulty acquiring*

Addressing / calling people
Greeting
Terms of endearment
Thanking
Responding to compliments
Apology
Parting ( leave-taking)

Three content categories emerged from the data analysis, which depict the three phases of pragmatic development that the participants

experienced in the process of acquiring pragmatic competence in the use of target language. The table below depicts findings relevant to the second research question: *How does the home culture identity of these NNSS participants influence their pragmatic competence development in the use of Spanish in Colombia?*

**Table 2.** Target language pragmatic development phases influenced by home cultural identity

Bewilderment with the Target Culture Norms
Collision between Native and Target Language Cultures
Finding the third places

## Results

This study provided participants a valid opportunity to revisit their own selves in their process of self-re-definition and express their own voice in a non-threatening space. Data analysis provided examples of reflections and narratives to elaborate on the participants' lived experiences of first language, culture, and identity in relation to target language pragmatic competence. With the two research questions as the established objectives, the results are divided in the following three themes generated through the data analysis.

### Bewilderment with the Target Culture Norms

In Colombia, these participants are faced with certain behaviors which they do not understand. As outsiders, they realized that they are confronted by surprises and departures from their expectations that signal a difference between their natal-culture and Colombian culture. They are the moments of incomprehension, when they suddenly did not know how to react in the situation.

Extract 1: Here people use skin color as nicknames like *negrito/negrita*. I'm often called *Morenita* here. That would never happen in the States, as it is considered politically incorrect to call a black person 'nigger.' It's very offensive to call someone by their skin color, it's like making a racist comment. But later on I figured out those names don't express racial discrimination. On the contrary, it's a friendly way to address people you know well. (Caroline, interview, Oct 7, 2013)<sup>3</sup>

Extract 2: One day I was driving to work. It was rush hour and the car in front of me was going very slow, so I over took the car. The driver in that

<sup>3</sup> *negrito o negrita* (lit. Blackie, used for both males and females)

car got really upset, so he speeded up and cut in front of me. He got off the car and walked towards me. As I rolled down the window, he said: “Amor, No haga eso en horas pico”. I nearly burst into laughter and I didn’t know how to react. It seems that the driver came over for a quarrel, but it sounded as if he was flirting with me by calling me *amor*. (Zi-ge, reflection, May5, 2013)<sup>4</sup>

Extract 3: My husband often calls other females *corazon*, *mija* or *preciosa*. I feel uncomfortable about it because it sounds too intimate. But later he explained to me the purpose of using terms of endearment is to show friendliness and to make people feel good. It also serves as an ice breaker and it helps shorten the distance when you talk to strangers. (Zi-ge, reflection, May 5, 2013)<sup>5</sup>

The above extracts demonstrated that these participants from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds perceived the force of terms of endearment and certain speech acts in Spanish of addressing people to be stronger than the speaker intended as they do not share the same system of knowledge or beliefs. It coincided with the explanation of pragmatic failure (Thomas, 1983; Samovar & Porte, 1997; Jandt, 2001) caused by inappropriate transference of speech act strategies from L1 to L2.

### Collision between Native and Target Language Cultures

The following examples showed that these participants felt uncomfortable or awkward using certain culturally-loaded words and idioms for which they can hardly find their equivalents in their mother tongue due to the fact that some notions and connotations embedded in the expressions clash with their first language identity and culture.

Extract 1: I kind of like it, but for me it’s over the top calling people *Mi Reina, mi princesa!* I also like my neighbors calling me *vecina*, but I don’t really use it because it’s not part of my culture. People in the States do say *Darling* or *sweetie pie*, but generally they are kind of more country or older, not my generation. A shop owner nearby my place always greets me by saying “Buenos dias! Mi reina!,” “Good morning! My Queen! “No one in the States would ever say that!! And I also found female friends

<sup>4</sup> *Mi amor, no haga eso en horas pico* (lit: My love, don’t do that during rush hour), my love is closer in meaning here to dear or darling.

Amor: (lit. love), but closer in meaning to dear or darling

<sup>5</sup> *corazón, mijita o preciosa.* (lit. heart, my daughter, and precious)

mija is an abbreviation of the words *mi hija* (lit. my daughter. Also used for *mi hijo*: my son)

here tend to say to me “Me encanta verte” a lot! Those expressions are over the top for me! (Caroline, interview, Sept 30, 2013).<sup>6</sup>

Extract 2: O In the States, we say “I’m sorry” when offering apologies, but here it’s like people don’t want to admit it’s their fault, so they say “Qué pena!” a lot more often than “Lo siento”. In my culture, if you sincerely offer your apologies for your wrong doing you’d say “I’m really sorry” not “What a pity”. “What a shame this happened to you!” I always say “Disculpe” or “perdon” in public transportation when trying to get off /on the bus/Transmillenio; and that makes me a ‘foreigner’ cause no one else says anything. They just push you out of the way. I say sorry a lot; I feel that our culture says sorry a lot, but I don’t think they do here. (Lilian, interview, May 12, 2013)<sup>7</sup>

Extract 3: Once I complimented a friend’s jacket. I said it looks really stylish and made with top-notch material. She replied “A la orden”. Maybe I misinterpreted the expression, then I asked her whether I can borrow it on Christmas day, she said “No”! I still don’t quite understand why people say “A la orden” when they don’t really mean it! For me it’s hypocritical for people to say things when they don’t mean it. In Chinese, we have a saying that goes “When words are once out your mouth, even four quick horses cannot chase them back”, which literally means that one has to keep his/her words. At first, I thought Colombian people are hypocritical, they don’t always mean what they say, but then I realized that they say “a la orden” out of courtesy, and it can’t be taken seriously! (Zi-ge, reflection, May 6, 2013).<sup>8</sup>

The above examples revealed that the collisions are caused by the fact that these participants cannot relate to or identify with the pragmatics encoded in those speech acts, which are in equivalent or even contradictory to their first language. The finding demonstrates that the learners’ home cultural identity does not facilitate, but impedes the learners from achieving pragmatic competence in the target language. The result supports the argument (Kramsch, 1993; Fantini, 2009; Schumann, 1978) that the learners’ native cultural based values, attitudes, and behaviors can be an obstacle to effective communication in the target context depending on the degree of social distance between the L2 learners and the TL communities. The linguistic and cultural distance between Chinese and Spanish is far greater than English and Spanish, thus; the Chinese participant Zi-ge seemed to encounter more

<sup>6</sup> *Mi reina, mi princesa* (lit. My queen, my princess), *vecina* (lit. neighbor), *!Buenos días!* *Mi reina:* (lit. Good morning, my queen!) *Me encanta verte.* (lit. I love seeing you, but closer in meaning to *I’m so glad to see you*).

<sup>7</sup> *Que pena* (lit. *What a shame*) *Disculpe:* Excuse me *Perdón:* (Lit. forgiveness), but closer in meaning to *I’m sorry* *Transmilenio:* Bogotá’s mass transit system

<sup>8</sup> *A la orden:* (lit. *at your command*, or *at your service*)

conflicts and experience greater difficulty than the other two English speaking participants in overcoming the discrepancy between the native linguaculture and the target one, which was reflected in her interview statements and her reflective memos.

### Finding the Third Place

The notion of the *third place* refers to the point of intercultural encounter, where interlocutors from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds communicate and interact successfully (Liddicoat & Lo Bianco, 1999). They further point out, “The ability to find this third place is at the core of intercultural competence” (p.15). The following excerpts demonstrate that these participants were in the process of negotiating comfortable third places between the self and the other, finding the middle ground between the home and the target culture.

Extract 1: I think it's very rude to call people according to their physical appearance such as *gordita* or *flaca*. I'm aware that *gordita* is normally for children. But I'm skinny, so my Colombian friends nickname me *flaca*. I didn't like it at first, then I realized that it's a jokey and friendly way to call your close friends, so I started to take it light heartedly. (Lilian, interview, May 12, 2013).<sup>9</sup>

Extract 2: When people say nice things like “Que estés bien”, it makes you feel liked. It's nice to hear even though they say it to everybody. Or “Que le vaya muy bien”. Phrases like those are really nice to hear, but in the United States, we don't really do it in English. But here, every time I say goodbye to somebody here, they always say “Que estés bien”. You do kind of think oh ..... That's so sweet, thanks! (Lilian, interview, May 12, 2013)<sup>10</sup>

Extract 3: It took me more than a year to start saying “Eres muy amable” every time after saying “Gracias”. I didn't understand why I had to praise people “It's very kind of you” for doing their jobs. From Chinese culture's perspective, we expect people to perform well at work, to do a good job. It's very strange for me having to pay compliment to people for getting their jobs done. I mean they're paid to do it, aren't they? However, here in Colombia it seems you have to say “Eres muy amable” after saying “thank you”, otherwise, people might think that you're not polite. Later, my husband explained to me that you can get your job done with a friendly attitude or an unpleasantly attitude, so we Colombians praise people for doing their jobs with a positive and service-oriented

<sup>9</sup> *Gordita*: (lit. Fattie), but closer in meaning to *chubby*, *Flaca*: (Lit. *bony, skinny*)

<sup>10</sup> *Que estés bien* (Lit. *Be ok*), but closer in meaning to *I wish that you are well*, *Que le vaya muy bien* (lit. *May everything go well*), but closer in meaning to *I wish that you do well*.

attitude. I started to think it makes sense, after accepting their point of view, I feel more comfortable using this phrase. (Zi-ge, reflection, May 5, 2013)<sup>11</sup>

The above excerpts illustrated that when using the target language or living in a new cultural community, the L2 learner's world views and perceptions towards the others might change after gaining new pragmatic knowledge. The finding supports the notion that culture is dynamic and subject to change (Block, 2007; Zu & Kong, 2009). The awareness of the differences between cultures provide the learners opportunities to adjust themselves to the "new" situations and to empathize with the target language community. These participants were able to appreciate and relate to the social world of the target language even though it took them some time to understand and accept the values and beliefs embedded in the target language system, which is very different from their natal social world.

### Conclusions

As indicated, the aim of this study was to explore the speech acts in Spanish that non-native participants found difficult to use properly in their daily interaction in Colombia, the impact of their first language culture identity on this and their subsequent adjustments to achieve pragmatic competence in the target language. The findings of the study reveal that these participants are constantly trying to build and rebuild their target language identity whenever they use the target language. They felt a strong conflict between the attitudes, beliefs and social norms of the home langua-culture and the target one. The results also showed that these participants found themselves struggling to perform some speech acts competently in various contexts because the notions and connotations embedded in the expressions clash with their first language identity and culture.

As their Spanish progresses, they constantly attempted to establish a connection with the target social community by trying to make sense of the meaning and purpose behind certain speech acts and to reestablish their cultural identity in the communication with their Spanish speaking interlocutor in social contexts in Colombia. The process of becoming a more effective speaker of the target language, involves mediating one's own home culture-based values and worldview with the target culture

<sup>11</sup> *eres muy amable* (lit. you are very kind) *gracias: Thank you*

ones. As a consequence, the respondents had a sense of insecurity, discomfort, and lack of confidence when speaking the target language. The findings revealed that it is not always necessary for language competency to maintain links between L1 and L2 in order to properly use and understand specific terms. These participants of different Spanish levels all encountered difficulty in understanding and using specific terms in Spanish at some point due to the interference of their first cultural identity. Not all of them managed to find third places for all the contradictions between their native languaculture and the target one. They rejected certain notions imbedded in the target language and accepted others. Even though they came to an understanding and acceptance of certain Spanish speech acts after a longer period of staying in Colombia, they still would not use them in their daily interaction because they do not have the habit of doing so in their home contexts.

The findings of this study offer some implications for teaching practices and future research in Colombian context. Due to the nature of a qualitative case study, the present study recruited a small number of participants to gain deeper insight. Further useful research could expand the sample size and investigate further on the issues that learners of Spanish as a foreign language encountered both linguistically and pragmatically in relation to linguistic and cultural distance between their native tongue and the target one. Hence, more constructive suggestions can be provided towards helping foreign leaners achieve intercultural communication competence in Colombian contexts.

Galvis (2011) pointed out that the pre-service teachers surveyed in his study found intercultural communication interesting, but yet not applicable in their teaching context in the public school sector due to the lack of meaningful encounters with foreign language speakers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, even though the ideology of intercultural communicative competence was promoted at the theoretical level in teacher's training at university. However, since 2015 the Colombian National Ministry of Education and El Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje (SENA) have partnered with Heart of Change, Atlas Corps and Volunteers Colombia to develop and implement the English Teaching Fellowship Programs (ETF), which have brought hundreds of foreign professionals to Colombia to help provide quality English education to thousands of public school students and English teachers throughout the country. With the increase of exposure to authentic intercultural interaction opportunities, the impact and effects of these bilingual programs have on the development of intercultural communication competence can be examined and explored in the near future.

Learning is a reciprocal process in foreign language classrooms where both teachers and students learn from each other to expand linguistic and cultural knowledge. No text book or materials can provide the sufficient cultural knowledge required for second or foreign language users to conduct their linguistic behavior competently and appropriately in cross-cultural situations. Hence, foreign language teachers play an important role in orienting the target language learners to their home culture and vice versa. If foreign language teachers have better awareness and understanding of their students' natal culture, they will be able to better help students overcome the cultural disparities that prevent them from using the target language competently in varied contexts. In addition, it is essential to incorporate pragmatics knowledge in the foreign language curriculum and instruction to make the foreign culture less threatening and more accessible to the language learner. By fostering foreign language user's target language pragmatics competence, they will be better able to establish the proper linkage between their first languaculture and the target one. This will in turn reduce learning conflicts and allow them to use the target language properly with confidence in various contexts.

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